

were seen foraging on tree trunks in 30 instances during the period September 1991-May 1993 (excluding the three months June-August 1992). The results are summarized in Table 1.

Birds were seen foraging on tree trunks in all months except November. Many of the birds were noticed feeding on termites, and quite a few were also seen feeding on other insects and spiders. Some of the birds were seen following the goldenbacked (*Dinopium benghalense*) or little scalybellied woodpeckers (*Picus xanthopygaeus*), often only a few centimetres away. Woodpeckers were seen displacing or attacking these birds on four of the thirteen instances when they were seen together. While six of the eleven bird species are known to forage on tree trunks, the others (marked with asterisk in the table) are not known to do so.

Whitten (1982) reported spangled drongos (*Dicrurus hottentotus*) taking ants from tree trunks on Siberut Island, Indonesia, where woodpeckers are absent and taking insects

from a dead tree on North Sulawesi, where just one woodpecker species occurs. He could not find instances of such behaviour in the Sunda Region where at least seven woodpecker species live sympatrically, and so he suggested that where woodpeckers are absent, the spangled drongo is able to occupy part of the vacant niche.

It is, therefore, interesting to find at least 11 species, in addition to the velvetfronted nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*), foraging on tree trunks in my study plots in Peechi -Vazhani area, where eight woodpecker species also occur.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was supported by the Wildlife Conservation Society, New York, USA.

October 27, 1997

V. SANTHARAM
68, First Floor
Santhome High Road
Chennai 600 028, India.

REFERENCE

WHITTEN, A.J. (1982) Possible niche expansion of the Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentotus* on Siberut Island. Indonesia. *Ibis* 124: 192-193.

7. THE NODDY TERN (BROWN NODDY) *ANOUS STOLIDUS* OFF THE SOUTH KONKAN COAST

On September 9, 1997, during one of my infrequent visits to the Vengurla Rocks, which lie about 9 nautical miles off Malwan, Sindhudurg dist., Maharashtra, I observed 18 noddy terns on Burnt Island, the landward-most rock of the tiny archipelago. Perched in small groups on rock ledges and on boughs of stunted vegetation on the leeward side of the rock, they showed little inclination to take part in the frenzied feeding activity of an estimated more than 4000 roseate terns *Sterna dougallii*, over 300 brownwinged (bridled) terns *Sterna anaethetus* and over 200 large crested terns *Sterna bergii* that were milling around the island. On a follow-up visit on September 30, 1997, G. Frost, N. Manville and I had a short sighting of a single noddy tern on the

wing, while there was no sign of any during a pre-monsoon visit on June 5, 1997.

The noddy, a purely pelagic tern, is known to breed in the Lakshadweep (Laccadive) Islands, specially on Pitti Atoll, about 570 km SSW of the Vengurla Rocks. It has been recorded as a straggler on the coasts of Sri Lanka and Pakistan (HANDBOOK 3:71). The sightings on Burnt Island appear to be the closest to the Indian mainland yet, and might be an indication of a possible extension of the breeding range of the noddy tern.

February 3, 1998

HEINZ LAINER
Praias de St. Antonio,
Anjuna 403 509, Goa, India.